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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 1152 (1998) CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1152 (1998) of 5 February 1998, in which the Council requested me to report, by 23 February 1998, on the situation in the Central African Republic, with recommendations regarding the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation and its financial implications, as well as information on the implementation of the Bangui Agreements and on the commitments made by the President of the Central African Republic in his letter of 8 January 1998 addressed to me.

2. The present report also provides an update on the situation in the Central African Republic since my last report, which was dated 23 January 1998 (S/1998/61). It supplements the information already contained in the third periodic report of the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB) of 30 January 1998 (S/1998/86). It also incorporates the findings of a small United Nations team that visited Bangui from 8 to 16 February to finalize recommendations on the mandate and concept of operations of a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation.

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS

3. On 28 January 1998, I addressed a letter to President Ange-Félix Patassé in order to impress on him the need to pursue vigorously efforts aimed at the full implementation of the Bangui Agreements and important political, security and economic reforms, as described in his letter of 8 January addressed to me (S/1998/61, annex). In a letter of 29 January, President Patassé strongly reiterated to me his commitment to carry out such reforms.

4. I have also followed up on the observations and recommendations made in my last report with key leaders in the region and other concerned Member States.

5. During the period under review, additional progress has been made in implementing the outstanding provisions of the Bangui Agreements and other major political reforms. On 29 January, the Commission on the Restructuring of the

5. During the period under review, additional progress has been made in implementing the outstanding provisions of the Bangui Agreements and other major political reforms. On 29 January, the Commission on the Restructuring of the Defence and Security Forces, chaired by the Minister of Defence and working under the overall supervision of General Amadou Toumani Touré (Mali), Chairman of the International Monitoring Committee, completed its work and recommended to the President the dissolution of the security services (namely, the Centre nationale de recherche et d'investigation and the Section d'enquête, de recherche et de documentation) and major downsizing and restructuring of the Presidential Guard. President Patassé is expected to sign decrees enacting these key recommendations into law.

6. Progress has also been made in addressing the provision of the Bangui Agreements pertaining to the abandonment of the judicial enforcement of the parliamentary audit in respect of persons presumed to have misappropriated funds under the previous regime. The Government presented to the National Assembly a revised bill, which had been prepared with the assistance of the International Monitoring Committee. The regular session of the National Assembly was scheduled to be convened in March to consider this issue. However, given the urgency of the matter, the Assembly decided to hold an extraordinary session on 9 February. The law on the abandonment of the parliamentary audit was adopted on 13 February, thus implementing another major provision of the Bangui Agreements.

7. A draft electoral code was also presented to the extraordinary session of the National Assembly. On 16 February, however, the Assembly decided to defer consideration of the electoral code until its regular session.

8. The National Reconciliation Conference, originally scheduled for 10 to 14 February 1998, has been postponed until 23 to 28 February to allow additional time for the necessary preparations. The political parties, with the support of the International Monitoring Committee and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), are actively engaged in preparations for the event, which should play a decisive role in consolidating the peace and reconciliation process. On 19 February, a meeting was convened with all main political actors to evaluate the implementation of the Bangui Agreements, and it was judged to have yielded satisfactory results.

III. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

9. The economic and social situation in the country has remained largely unchanged. The arrears in payments to public servants, soldiers, pensioners and students continue to be a cause for concern and to give rise to strikes in various public sectors.

10. Missions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank visited Bangui from 3 to 17 February 1998 to review the economic and financial situation, as well as the 1998 budget, structural reform plans for the current year and medium-term programmes. Discussions conducted by those missions have reportedly led to solid progress in putting into place a preliminary cash treasury plan for 1998, as well as in identifying a number of key elements that

could form the basis for a comprehensive medium-term structural adjustment programme. The World Bank and IMF missions are scheduled to return to Bangui in the near future to help the authorities finalize a policy framework document. It is clear that substantial technical and financial support from the international community will be necessary to implement the proposed adjustment programme. At the same time, the Bretton Woods institutions have repeatedly stressed that adequate security conditions are absolutely essential for the success of the necessary economic and financial reforms.

IV. SECURITY ASPECTS

11. The overall security situation in the Central African Republic has improved steadily, but is still a cause for concern. While relative calm has been established in Bangui owing to the presence and active operations of MISAB, banditry/armed robbery is a major problem, in particular in the interior of the country. Light weapons remain in circulation and can also easily be acquired from neighbouring countries. The security situation remains precarious. According to some reports, elements of the former armed forces of Zaire have found refuge in the southern part of the Central African Republic, while local militias are present in the northern areas of the country.

12. The recommendations of the Commission on the Restructuring of the Defence and Security Forces are generally in accord with the Bangui Agreements and with the statements made by President Patassé earlier this year indicating his intention to create a national, republican and multi-ethnic army, whose size and activities would be in line with national budgetary capacity. It is hoped that those recommendations will be adopted promptly and signed into law.

13. Closely connected to and supportive of this restructuring programme is the demobilization and reinsertion project, which is coordinated and conducted by UNDP in close collaboration with the Government. This project, which was officially launched on 11 January 1998, is aimed at demobilizing over 1,000 members of the Central African armed forces.

14. Lasting stability and security in the country will ultimately depend, inter alia, on the transformation of the Central African defence and security forces into a reliable professional corps dedicated to respect for the rule of law. The initiatives launched towards that end must be actively and systematically pursued. While the main responsibility for these important reforms rests with the Government, it is essential that the international community support the Government in carrying them out through bilateral assistance programmes. I therefore call on potential donors, in particular those with traditionally close ties to the country, to contribute generously to these endeavours.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

15. As noted above, since my report of 23 January 1998, significant progress has been made in implementing the Bangui Agreements and in initiating essential political and economic reforms in the Central African Republic. Credit for

these important developments is mainly due to the people of the Central African Republic and the leadership of the country. However, this progress could not have been achieved without the untiring efforts of the leaders of the region, and, in particular, the International Mediation Committee and the International Monitoring Committee, which, with the support of UNDP, have played a crucial role in stabilizing the situation in the country following the three mutinies of 1996.

16. At the same time, much remains to be done to ensure a lasting peace in the Central African Republic. While the National Reconciliation Conference could become an important milestone towards genuine national reconciliation and the full implementation of the Bangui Agreements, the important declarations made by the Government in this regard must be expeditiously translated into concrete action.

17. It is also imperative that an electoral code, addressing crucial issues, including the composition and chairmanship of the Electoral Commission, be adopted as soon as possible, if legislative elections are to be conducted as scheduled in August/September 1998. The limited time-frame and daunting logistical difficulties facing the electoral process represent a real challenge. The conduct of the elections will require a major effort on the part of the Government, which must allocate the necessary funds for it. Substantial and urgent assistance will be required from donor countries, including in the areas of civic education, registration and public information.

18. Furthermore, it is essential that substantial economic and financial reforms be undertaken urgently. Unless rapid and far-reaching measures aimed at the financial and economic recovery of the country are implemented, the present socio-economic conditions are likely to continue seriously to undermine the overall security and stability of the country.

19. In addition, it is vital that the Government take the necessary steps to reform and train the national army, police and gendarmerie in order to enhance their capacity to maintain law and order effectively.

20. In the light of recent developments, I believe that the observations and recommendations presented in my report of 23 January on the situation in the Central African Republic remain valid. It is obvious that the progress achieved towards national reconciliation is still fragile and that the situation is far from being irreversible. By all accounts, political leaders of Member States participating in MISAB have played a remarkable role in bringing about positive changes in the Central African Republic. However, MISAB will not be able to continue its presence in Bangui without external financial and logistical support. Consequently, without a credible successor force, the situation in the country is likely to deteriorate rapidly, with serious implications for the humanitarian situation and peace and security in the region.

21. If security and stability in the Central African Republic, and indeed in the subregion, are to be maintained, and further progress is to be made towards sustainable national reconciliation, the only viable option remains the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation to take over from MISAB. It will be recalled that, by its resolution 1152 (1998), the Security

Council authorized the continued conduct by Member States participating in MISAB of their operation in the Central African Republic until 16 March and expressed its intention to take a decision by that date on the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic on the basis of the present report.

22. Given the progress made in implementing the Bangui Agreements and the commitments expressed in President Patassé's letter of 8 January 1998 (S/1998/61, annex), I recommend that the Security Council examine carefully the facts given in the present report in order to consider the establishment of a peacekeeping operation as described in the annex to the present report. Cost estimates for the new operation will be issued shortly as an addendum to the present report.

23. Were the Council to so decide, the establishment of the mission and the implementation of its mandate would present a major political and logistical challenge to the United Nations troop-contributing countries and interested Member States. The mission would have to rely heavily on the readiness of all interested countries to remain closely involved in the peace process and to assist in every possible way, including through the provision of logistical back-up. I am pleased to inform the Security Council that the Government of France has conveyed to the Secretariat its willingness to provide the United Nations peacekeeping operation with logistical and medical support, as well as its readiness to participate in the evacuation of United Nations personnel in case of emergency.

24. In accordance with the plans contained in the annex to the present report, I recommend that the Security Council decide that the duration of the operation be limited to 90 days after the announcement of legislative election results, and that the initial mandate of the United Nations mission be established for a period of three months in order to allow the Council to review the implementation of the commitments made by the Government of the Central African Republic. I also recommend that the Council approve the special arrangements, which would allow a smooth transition towards the new operation, and authorize the continued conduct of MISAB until 15 April 1998. In this connection, I would like to stress that the support of MISAB troop contributors will be essential for the success of the United Nations effort. In the meantime, as recommended in resolution 1152 (1998), I intend to appoint a Special Representative to the Central African Republic, who would assist the parties in the implementation of the Bangui Agreements.

25. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude once again to the Member States participating in MISAB and to the International Mediation Committee and the International Monitoring Committee, as well as to United Nations programmes and agencies operating in the Central African Republic, for their invaluable efforts to bring national reconciliation and stability to that country.

Annex

MANDATE AND CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS OF THE PROPOSED UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

A. Introduction

1. While some additional progress has been made in implementing the Bangui Agreements and MISAB has succeeded in establishing relative calm and security in Bangui, the overall political and security situation in the Central African Republic is still a matter of concern. Substantive and active involvement of the international community continues to be required to achieve sustainable peace and a stable social environment in the country. Should the Security Council so decide, such an international presence would be established in the form of a multi-functional peacekeeping operation to be known as the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic/Mission des Nations Unies en République centrafricaine (MINURCA). The operation would have the following main goals:

(a) To assist the people of the Central African Republic to consolidate the process of national reconciliation on the basis of the full implementation of the Bangui Agreements and subsequent undertakings by promoting vital reforms through programmes supported by the international community;

(b) To assist in sustaining a secure and stable environment in the capital of the Central African Republic, which is essential for general stability in the country; to support the establishment of the necessary conditions for the holding of free and fair legislative elections to be held in August/September 1998; and to observe and verify the conduct of the elections if these conditions are met.

2. The mandate of the Mission would be of a limited duration and, subject to the decision of the Security Council, would end 90 days after the announcement of the election results. However, the actual drawdown of MINURCA would begin no later than 60 days from the date of such an announcement. In carrying out its mandate, the Mission would cooperate closely with regional initiatives, in particular the International Mediation Committee and the International Monitoring Committee, as well as with the Organization of African Unity.

B. Mandate

3. The main elements of the mandate of MINURCA would be:

(a) Political:

(i) To assist in the implementation of major reforms pursuant to the Bangui Agreements and the decisions of the National Reconciliation Conference by promoting national reconciliation and providing good offices and mediation between the Government and political parties in the country;

(ii) To provide coordination, political guidance and support to all United Nations activities in the country;

(iii) To cooperate with other international partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions, with the objective of supporting activities aimed at establishing the foundations for lasting peace, national reconstruction and development;

(iv) To provide advice and facilitate technical assistance in the areas of good governance and promotion of human rights;

(b) Military:

(i) To assist in maintaining and enhancing security and stability, including freedom of movement, in Bangui and the immediate vicinity of the city, thus assisting the Central African authorities in maintaining a secure environment throughout the country;

(ii) To assist the national security forces in maintaining law and order and in protecting key installations in Bangui;

(iii) To supervise and control the storage of all weapons retrieved in the course of the disarmament exercise;

(iv) To assist in the establishment of an environment conducive to the holding of free and fair legislative elections;

(v) To ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel and the safety and security of United Nations property;

(c) Police:

(i) To assist in the training of trainers and other capacity-building efforts of the national police and gendarmerie, to provide advice for the restructuring of security forces and to coordinate international technical assistance;

(ii) To monitor the neutrality of the security forces before and during the elections;

(d) Electoral:

(i) To provide advice to the national electoral bodies and coordinate international technical assistance for the conduct of the legislative elections;

(ii) To monitor the preparations for the elections and determine whether the requirements for holding free and fair elections are fulfilled;

(iii) To observe the elections and verify the results of the elections, provided those requirements are fulfilled.

C. Concept of operations

Political aspects

4. To pursue the political goals outlined above, the Mission would be headed by a Special Representative with an office comprised of the necessary political, legal, public information and human rights staff operating in Bangui. My Special Representative would assist in the implementation of the reforms necessary to achieve national reconciliation and stability in the country. The Special Representative would have overall authority over all United Nations activities in the Central African Republic in support of the Mission's mandate. In order to ensure optimal coordination, the United Nations Resident Coordinator/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative would concurrently serve as Director of the Office of the Special Representative.

5. Because of a lack of reliable infrastructure in the country, the Mission would include a small public information component. In close coordination with UNDP, two international staff would prepare information on United Nations activities and major developments in the country for dissemination through the local media. In close collaboration with donors and non-governmental organizations, the Mission would launch a United Nations radio programme to promote national reconciliation and the goals of the Mission, including the dissemination of information on the electoral process. Two human rights experts would be attached to the Mission in order to provide, as requested by the Government, advice to the national authorities and organizations on human rights issues and to identify technical assistance needs for capacity-building in this important area. The experts would, through my Special Representative, coordinate with and seek guidance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

6. A special coordination and implementation mechanism could be established, to be co-chaired by my Special Representative and the Chairman of the International Monitoring Committee, in which the Government, representatives of the opposition and major donors would participate. The United Nations, with the assistance of UNDP and other donors, would provide a small technical secretariat for such a mechanism.

Military aspects

7. The task of maintaining a secure environment in Bangui and its immediate vicinity requires the deployment of an international military force with sufficient capability not only to carry out the Mission's mandate, but also to provide credible protection to United Nations personnel and property, should the situation deteriorate. In addition, the force and the whole Mission would have to rely on the readiness of a major military power to provide "over-the-horizon" deterrence and assistance in case of emergency evacuation or other major threats.

8. To assist in maintaining security in Bangui, a city with a population of between 500,000 and 600,000, a United Nations force consisting of six mechanized infantry companies, each approximately 120 to 150 personnel strong, would be

required. The infantry would establish and maintain over 30 stationary and mobile patrols/checkpoints on a 24-hour basis in various parts of the city. They would also provide security to key installations in Bangui and guard collection/storage areas for heavy weapons, all of which should be placed under United Nations control. The force would be able to provide some security and logistical support for the demobilization programme coordinated by UNDP. If need be, it would assist in investigating violations of the Bangui Agreements in the military area.

9. At the same time, a reinforced infantry company would be needed to guard the M'Poko airbase, which would be vital for the Mission as the main entry, exit and resupply point, as well as Mission headquarters and other key United Nations facilities. In addition, in order to be able to provide a swift and flexible response to any serious threat and to compensate for the withdrawal of the French combat units from the Central African Republic, a special reinforced squadron of light armoured vehicles, supported by a heavy mortar platoon, would be required to respond to possible aggressive action from areas around the city.

10. A military logistic unit of up to 150 personnel should be attached to the force to support the military and other components of the Mission in the absence of the necessary facilities in the Central African Republic. Such a unit would be capable of providing maintenance of military equipment and transportation of basic supplies. It is envisaged that substantial parts of MINURCA logistical support would be routed through the closest seaport, Douala, Cameroon, which would necessitate a well-balanced mix of surface and air transport.

11. With the poor road infrastructure and acute shortage of transportation, and in order to ensure a long-range medical evacuation capacity, it would be desirable to assign to the Mission two fixed-wing aircraft, which would preferably be civilian-contracted. At the same time, for urgent evacuation over short distances, resupply and reconnaissance around the capital, three medium-lift utility helicopters operated by a military unit not exceeding 50 personnel would be needed.

12. To establish reliable radio and telephone communications links between the force headquarters and its military units, a small military signals unit may be required. However, a civilian communications network would be necessary to provide links on the ground and to liaise with United Nations Headquarters. In view of the limited medical infrastructure in the Central African Republic, a military medical unit would be deployed to provide medical support to United Nations civilian and military personnel. Such a unit would provide level 2 medical assistance, while level 3 emergencies would be referred to other medical facilities elsewhere in the region.

13. At the same time, a force headquarters totalling up to 75 personnel, which would also contribute to the integrated operations and logistics systems of MINURCA, would have to provide command, control and liaison functions.

14. In view of the considerations and challenging tasks presented above, it is estimated that the minimum strength of the force necessary to perform the military mandate of the Mission would be approximately 1,400 personnel all ranks. However, I will continue to review the requirements of the force in

light of developments in the security situation, particularly any requirement to deploy outside Bangui and the need to achieve maximum efficiency and economy.

Police aspects

15. Both the national gendarmerie and the national police suffer from an acute lack of equipment and professional training. To design and conduct training-of-trainers programmes for the police and, to some extent, for the national gendarmerie, the Mission would rely on the services of up to 24 civilian police experts/observers. Such a small civilian police unit would also monitor the implementation of the restructuring plans for the Central African security forces and assist in mobilizing and coordinating international technical assistance. Finally, United Nations police observers would monitor the neutrality of the national police and gendarmerie in Bangui and several key areas of the country before and during the legislative elections. United Nations staff would monitor the electoral campaign by attending public meetings and demonstrations, liaising with the local police authorities, investigating allegations of human rights abuses and conducting other relevant activities.

Electoral aspects

16. An Electoral Unit of three electoral officers would be included in the Mission to assist, in collaboration with UNDP, the Central African authorities with planning and technical support for the legislative elections scheduled for August/September 1998. In due course, electoral observers drawn primarily from United Nations programmes and agencies in the Central African Republic and in the region, as well as other international personnel, would be recruited to establish a presence in the interior of the country. The Unit would also be in charge of coordinating the possible presence of other international electoral observers. The United Nations would also work to mobilize and coordinate the international assistance necessary for the successful conduct of the elections. Such assistance would supplement the considerable efforts that will have to be made by the Central African authorities to overcome significant logistical and financial constraints.

Administrative aspects

17. The complex nature of the proposed Mission would require the establishment of a reliable civilian logistical back-up in Bangui, and later, during the legislative elections, in some other areas of the country. It is anticipated that the Government of the Central African Republic will provide a substantial contribution to the operation of MINURCA by making facilities and accommodation available free of charge, as well as providing to the United Nations, at the lowest possible cost, other services and essential supplies. The above requirements would be reflected in a status-of-forces agreement to be concluded between the Government of the Central African Republic and the United Nations. At the same time, the effectiveness of the Mission would undoubtedly depend on the willingness of France to provide logistical support in the country and to maintain a presence in the region, as well as on its readiness to transfer to the United Nations some of the major assets currently available to the French military contingent in the Central African Republic.

18. A United Nations trust fund would be established to enable Member States to make voluntary contributions towards the activities of MINURCA.

D. Transitional arrangements

19. The security environment prevailing in Bangui and throughout the country strongly mitigates against any gap in the stabilization process. The only realistic approach in this regard is to rely on the military contingents already stationed in Bangui as part of the MISAB force. I have already initiated contacts with the current MISAB contributors and France, all of which have expressed their readiness, in principle, to participate in the proposed United Nations operation. The additional elements, which would perform various support functions, would have to be provided by new troop contributors, and I have approached a number of Member States in this regard.

20. Under the current very tight schedule, the establishment of the new United Nations operation will be an extremely challenging task. Therefore, to allow for a smooth transition to MINURCA, an additional extension of the mandate of MISAB would be necessary until 15 April 1998. If carefully planned and adequately supported, such a transition could be executed within a period of four to six weeks from the adoption of an enabling resolution by the Security Council. In order to carry out the transition in the most timely and efficient manner, it would be my intention, as soon as possible after the adoption of a Council resolution, to dispatch to Bangui a transition team, including an advance headquarters, of up to 45 military planners and logisticians. This process would also be greatly facilitated if France, which is currently providing critical support to MISAB, would be ready to transfer to the new United Nations operation essential equipment and facilities, as well as to provide other services to MINURCA. During the transition period, the troops currently serving under MISAB would continue to depend on full logistical back-up provided by France. However, to ensure the timely transfer of authority and overall responsibility to the United Nations, I would seek expeditiously an initial budgetary and procurement authorization from the appropriate United Nations bodies.

21. The formal establishment of the new Mission would be accompanied by a transfer of authority of MISAB forces, totalling some 800 personnel, to United Nations command, which would be conducted on 15 April 1998, concurrent with the phased rotation of fresh troops into the mission area. As described above, additional units to provide operational and support services currently performed by the French troops (who are scheduled to depart the Central African Republic by 15 April), should be deployed to Bangui not later than by mid-April 1998.